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From Jien (1155-1225) to Son'en (1298-1356): The Evolution of Exegetical Poetry in Medieval Japan

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This paper reflects the present stage of a research that has been going on for a few years now, the starting point of which having been what was, at first glance, a rather simple, or perhaps irrelevant question: « Can Japanese be considered a mystical language ? ». I understand that the very wording of this question raises in turn many further questions, the most important one being without any doubt « what is a 'mystical language' ? » There are two possible answers to that.

The more obvious one is that a mystical language is a language in which is written a substantial body of literature purporting to relate mystical experiences. On this account, most of the European languages could be held as such: from English (Brigit of Norwitch; *The Cloud of Unknowing*) to German (with Meister Eckhart, Tauler) or Dutch (Ruysbroek), from Spanish (John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila) to Italian (Francis of Assisi), or even French (i.a. Blaise Pascal in a famous fragment), and probably many others (Russian for example with *Tales of a Pilgrim*); so are too most of the languages of Moslem cultures, be it, foremostly, Persian, or Urdu, Turkish or Malay, or the 'vernacular' languages of India. Actually, it would be rather difficult to find, in the vast field of Eurasian literatures, a language which would not be a 'mystical language' according to this first definition. Indeed, we are closer here to literary history, 'mystical language' meaning broadly « a language endowed with a mystical literature ».

The second definition is a more restrictive one, which does not stop to the mystical experience as described by those languages, but relates directly to the language itself: a 'mystical language' is a language which by its very nature allows progress in religious or mystical knowledge, at least for the believers. A mystical language partakes of the very nature of transcendental reality itself, if we may use such a vocabulary. In the mind of the believers, to deepen one's understanding of such a language is to heighten one's awareness of God, in the case of a theistic religion, or, in the case of buddhism, of a superior reality. This understanding is by no means a mere philological one; it is a religious practice, a contemplation of the way words and meanings interfere, a contemplation which in some way transforms the adept.

This latter definition practically equates 'mystical' language with 'sacred

language', and it is well nigh impossible to clearly differentiate the two dimensions. I would here venture to say that a sacred language is a more passive notion: it is understood that the parangons of sacred tongues are e.g. Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit, that is to say languages in which were written, or revealed, some Sacred Scriptures. Being a revelation (I cannot engage here in a discussion on differences between the diverse religious traditions), they are in principle intangible entities and are by their very nature beyond human agency. The dogma of the eternity of the Koran in the Arabic language is a most telling example of the status of a sacred language: according to a widely received notion, the Holy Scripture is without beginning nor end, just as God himself. As it has been pointed out, it would in fact be in the same relation to God as the Son is to the Father in christianity. Such a dogma entails that the language and even the script (in the case of Hebrew and Arabic) which convey the Scriptures are themselves eternal.

To deal with holy tongues is thus to have a close encounter with the deity. A most straightforward expression of that idea is the sentence by which a British academic is said to have always begun his yearly lectures on the Hebrew language: «Gentlemen, this is the language which God spoke». As most people are ready to admit that a language both informs the mind of its speakers from the first moments of their lives and somehow orientates their representation of the outside world, a conception such as the one expressed in the above quotation leads to the conclusion that the study of a sacred tongue, inasmuch of course as it is pursued by a believer, provides in some way an insight into the very mind of God. God's mind being infinite and unfathomable, the language which conveys it must be as unfathomable: the language of Scriptures thus carries innumerable meanings. It is well known that one of the Jewish representations of Paradise depicts the blessed souls eternally commenting the Holy Scripture without ever exhausting its depth, and enjoying every minute of it, a conception of eternal bliss in which I am sure many of the more philological-minded among us will readily concur.

The study of a sacred language cannot of course remain limited to the purely philological side: being an insight into God's mind (or into transcendental reality, if I may yet again indulge in great words), it tends spontaneously to become a fruition of the sacred text; in this way every sacred language is at the same time a mystical language, inasmuch as it is both the means and the end of religious experience.

The pivot and doctrinal justification which allows to pass from the study of a sacred language to its fruition in contemplative – that is, mystical – states is the postulate of the multiple meanings of Scriptures. Even if one cannot rule out possible historical contacts and transmission through the whole of Eurasia (including large parts

of Africa), we cannot but wonder at the eerie similarity of the exegetical methods elaborated in different religious traditions, through the help of which the commentator gradually becomes a contemplator.

The fourfold meanings of Scriptures acknowledged in Jewish, Islamic and Christian exegesis have most probably a common origin, but it would be very difficult to find a direct influence from these mediterranean traditions on the sophisticated exegetical methods of the Tiantai/Tendai school that prevailed in Japan. We have here at first glance enough similarities to validate the concept of « sacred language » (that is, the canonical language of Scriptures) and of « mystical language » even in a buddhist context, where the received view is that there is no sacred language recognized as such, although one could argue that in later buddhism the Sanskrit language was conferred a status very near to that.

I hope to show here that the question raised at the beginning: « Can Japanese be considered a mystical language ? » is not irrelevant at least to the main subject of this symposium – « Figures and Places of the Sacred » –, that the skillful use of traditional (literary) language and poetics by Jien offers a case of mystical use of language in both meanings proposed above, first as the medium of mystical experience and then as the object itself of religious contemplation. Then I will try and show that Son.en, a poet very close to Jien by his career and poetical works, carried further the religious dimension of common poetics and wrote a poetry that would be indistinguishable from the merely literary one without its being marked as religious, the consequence of this being that all the wordly landscapes commonly sung by traditional poetry can be considered as sacred inasmuch as they are the concretization of the Scriptures. The figures of the traditional Japanese poem (*waka*) were thus used for the expression of the sacred, and once it was conferred a mystical status, the places of the Japanese landscape traditionally praised in this poetry were in turn absorbed in this sacredness. We might even ask ourselves to what extent traditional Japanese poetry can be read in its entirety as religious, even without being explicitly marked as such.

The prime place of this religious process is thus the buddhist *waka*. In the two poetical collections considered here, the poems are actually the place of encounter of two different linguistic traditions; by their textual display itself, both collections confront the Chinese to the Japanese language. For all practical matters, the Chinese language here, as in Japanese buddhist culture generally speaking, can be assimilated to a sacred language. Being the main language for the transmission of the buddhist Scriptures to Japan (the place of Sanskrit being altogether different and best left for another discussion), the Chinese language is the ultimate medium of scriptural

reference, the only object of infinite deepening of sense through exegesis and hermeneutics, in their diverse levels from the philological to the contemplative ones. There is full evidence for that idea; it shall be enough to mention here the « Opening Scripture » of the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Sutra of Innumerable Meanings*.

This fascinating dialogue between two languages is an excellent example of what I have called a 'hieroglossic' relation, with a 'vulgar' language expanding the message of the 'sacred' one through its own means of expression, this very act of expansion being a mode of contemplation, what we might call a 'mystic of words'. A most interesting feature of this hieroglossic relation is the poetical convention imposing in the *waka* the exclusion, as far as possible, of Sino-japanese words to the benefit of 'genuine' Japanese vocabulary. To be sure, this genuineness is limited by philological knowledge prevalent at the time: a number of words which are in reality ancient Chinese loan-words (*kuni*, *fumi*) or not perceived as Chinese (*shuyu*, *oku*) have entered the common poetic vocabulary, but the basic assumption is clear: a good literary piece can only comprise 'pure' Japanese words; allowance can be made for one, or two at the utmost, Sino-japanese terms, but very exceptionally. For the purpose of my talk, I must take into account only those poems that contain 'pure' Japanese vocabulary.

The subgenre of *waka* poetry that deals mainly with buddhist tenets is called *shakkyōka*, a term mainly understood as 'poems on Shaka's teachings', but these chinese characters can be translated as well as 'poems explaining the doctrine', that is, the buddhist doctrine, an interpretation not enough taken into account, although Professor Yamada Shozen gives a very accurate definition of these poems when explaining the term *kyōshika* ('sutra poems'): « Those in which the poet has extracted phrases from a scripture such as the *Lotus Sutra* and, using them as themes or titles, composed verses about the meaning, beliefs, or ideas contained in the phrases. »¹

The study of Jien's poetry is especially rewarding from that point of view: he is without doubt a fully recognized Japanese poet, a literary personality as well as a full fledged historian, whose *Gukansho*² has long been acclaimed as the deepest reflection on the meaning of history attempted in medieval Japan. As a poet, he received direct influence from the greatest luminaries of his time, Shunzei, Teika, Saigyō, enjoyed the patronage of the retired emperor Gotoba, who thought very highly of him, and was the second most represented author in the *Shinkokinshū* after Saigyō. His poetical works have been collected in the *Shūgyokushū* or *Collection of Gathered Jewels*, in which we find many poems with buddhist overtones. Most of all, Jien was an accomplished buddhist scholar, a learned monk of the Tendai school, who was chosen four times as head priest³ of this sect and promoted to the rank of 'archbishop'⁴. Having been trained

in the Shôren-in temple, he became its third abbot as well. Deeply versed in the esoteric teachings of the Tendai tradition, he was eventually attracted to the Pure Land faith and had contacts with Hônen and with Shinran, himself a young novice.

While we owe to Saigyô and Shunzei small series of poems celebrating each one of the twenty-eight chapters of the *Lotus Sutra*, Jien went further. He left a small poetical collection, now included in the *Shûgyokushû*, entirely devoted to that sutra and commonly entitled *Hundred Poems on the Lotus Sutra* (*Ei-hokekyô hyakushu*). Actually, this collection comprises 144 or 145 *waka* (according to different textual traditions) composed under one hundred (and one) quotations from the *Lotus Sutra*. Besides this, there is another very short corpus of twenty-six poems on the teaching of the Ten Suchnesses as appearing in chapter II (*Hôbenbon*) of Kumârajîva's version of the *Lotus Sutra*⁵, the first twelve of which need not detain us here, as they are overloaded with sino-japanese compounds and can hardly be read as literary pieces. In the fourteen remaining, however, we have only one such compound, and whatever may be their literary value, there is no doubt that they are meant to follow traditional literary standards, four of them being even subtitled according to the four seasons, thus fitting a well known pattern.

These collections are particularly interesting because there is no need to let imagination run on the loose in order to find hidden connections or meanings in the poems contained there: the necessary clues for a correct understanding are given by the poet himself, as the scriptural quotation, usually one or two verses, a prose sentence or part of a sentence drawn from the *Lotus Sutra*, is written in caption over the relevant poems. Through this simple device is elaborated an intercommunication between both levels of language, Chinese and Japanese, which entitles the reader to find in the latter languages traces from the former.

What we have here is the linguistic facet of the driving principle in the premodern evolution of Japanese buddhism, that is « traces descended from the original ground » (*honji-suijaku*)⁶, the view that Japanese deities are manifestations adapted to the Japanese people of universal buddhas and bodhisattvas. This is clearly hinted at by Jien in the foreword written in classical Chinese to his collection of a hundred (and forty-five poems)⁷. Although he does not specifically mention there the very expression *honji-suijaku*, he quotes the first half of the equivalent expression *wakô-dôjin*, originally hailing from Laozi's *Daodejing* and repeated at the beginning of Zhiyi's *Mohezhi guan*, taken in the meaning of « assuaging one's radiance to adapt oneself to the worldly dust », with a quite meaningful identification: « Our great Bodhisattva is the assuaged radiance of Śākyamuni and Amitabha in one identity⁸ and

the original fountainhead⁹ of Ise and Hachiman deities in the same substance¹⁰. » Just after that comes a telling play upon the words just quoted: « I use Japanese words to assuage the text of the Scriptures », where full use is made of the equivocalness of the character *wa* / *yawaragu* meaning ‘peace, harmony’, ‘to soften, to alleviate’, as well as ‘Japanese’. This subtle pun endows the Japanese language with the faculty of adapting in its own right the teachings coming from a foreign land. It is here clearly a transposition on the linguistic level of the ‘theological’ idea of *wakô-dôjin*: in the same manner as Japanese *kami* are special emanations from the universal, cosmic and infinite entities of buddhism, so the Japanese language itself – presumably the language of the *kami* – is a concrete and specific manifestation, an unfolding and determination of the illimited potentialities of the fundamental tongue of the Chinese Scriptures.

Incidentally, I would like to point out that these buddhist poems, and not only Jien’s, are the best, and possibly the only evidence, of a systematic attempt by Japanese clerics at translating the special vocabulary of the buddhist teachings into their own language. This bold attempt has been rather neglected by students; it is true that it cannot be compared to the formidable achievements of the Tibetan learned monks, but the fact is that we have here an impressive number of basic buddhist notions, and sophisticated ones too, expressed through authentic Japanese vocabulary.

Let me give first one or two examples of how Japanese poets operate on single items of buddhist vocabulary. In the foreword I have just quoted, Jien says: *kyôgen ni nitari to iedomo, mata jitsudô ni tsû-zu*¹¹, « Although they may seem to be foolish, these words help pass into the way of Reality ». We find in this sentence a key-word which gives a clue to the underlying principle for understanding this poetry: the Chinese character for ‘reality’, *jitsu* is read in Japanese either *minori* or *makoto*, meaning in the former case ‘fructification, bearing fruit’, or ‘fruit’, or ‘kernel’ and in the latter ‘real, true, authentic’. Now, a well-known Japanese translation from ancient times for the Sino-japanese *hō*¹², itself translating the sanskrit *dharma*, is *nori*, meaning more or less ‘law, decree’; *nori* usually appears in *waka poetry* as a ‘pure’ Japanese substitute for *hō*. Often prefixed with the honorific *mi*, it translates the ‘August Law’, *myôhō*¹³, that is, the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*. We have thus the word *minori* = *myôhō*, homophonic with *minori* as a reading of *jitsu* ‘reality’. Even when the word is obviously used in the sense of *dharma*, we must understand that the meaning of ‘reality’ is underlying, as is evidenced by poem 14¹⁴ about the five thousand monks and nuns of ‘overweening pride’¹⁵ who leave the Dharma assembly: *sono minori / kokoro ni irade / idenishi ha / enu wo etari to / omou hito nomi* « Those who left without this august Law entering their heart are all people who thought they had gained what they had (in

fact) not gained. » The meaning is here rather obvious at the surface level, but if we refer to the pertaining passage in the Lotus Sutra (four words of which are quoted in caption by Jien), we find that the character *jitsu* appears in the main sentence: « My assembly has no more branches and leaves, it has only firm fruit. »¹⁶ The expression 'august Law' is therefore equated with the notion of 'reality' through the pun on *minori*. If we read Jien's sentence in his foreword in the light of this association of words, we understand that the 'way of reality' is the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, to which the 'foolish words' of Japanese language poetry give direct access (*tsû*).

This can be further expanded; poem 17, under the scriptural caption « There is but the teaching of the One Vehicle »¹⁷, says: *izukata mo / nokosazu yukite / tazunu to mo / hana wa minori no / hana bakari koso*¹⁸ « You may look in all directions, leaving nothing: of flowers you will only find the Flower of the Law. » This teaching, or 'law', of the One Vehicle is the core of the Lotus Sutra, the 'real teaching'¹⁹ as opposed to the 'expediential' or 'provisory teachings'²⁰. A few verses later in the same passage of the Sutra, we have the same thought expressed in different words: « Only this one cause is real [or true], while the other two are untrue. »²¹ There is little doubt here that *minori* is to be understood in both meanings of 'real' and 'true', as is showed by the negative 'untrue, not true'. Poem 120 gives a clear instance of *minori* being used with the superimposed meaning of 'fruit', as evidenced by the verb *naru* 'to grow fruit, to ripen' immediately following it: *yuki no yama no / minori narurashi / toshi o hete / hiroku furishiku / sue zo ureshiki*²² « The fruit of the Law on the Snowy Mounts shall grow; widely spreading along the years, what bliss is to be expected at the end! »

There are about ten poems using the word *minori* in Jien's Hundred Poems on the Lotus Sutra, against twenty-four with the simple *nori*, which makes thirty-four occurrences in all; that is a little more than once every fourth poem. Such a frequency is not indifferent.

Now, the other Japanese reading of the character *jitsu* is *makoto*. One of the most famous poem in Jien's collection²³ says: *Tsu no kuni no / Naniwa no koto mo / makoto to wa / tayori no kado no / michi yori zo shiru* « That Naniwa Bay in the province of Tsu is real too, we may know it from the Path to the Gate of Salvation ». The 'Path to the Gate of Salvation' is obviously the Chapter on Skillful Means²⁴ of the Lotus Sutra, as *tayori* is the Japanese reading of the character *ben*. This poem is given under the scriptural caption « The reality of dharmas »²⁵; the words *Naniwa no koto* are a well-known pun on the place-name Naniwa which, coupled with *koto* yields the expression *naniha-goto* and its variants, meaning 'everything': thus these opaquely poetic words are nothing but the translation in Japanese of the Chinese buddhist

technical term for the ‘reality of dharmas’, an interpretation which is confirmed by poem 101²⁶: *nani-goto mo / makoto no nori ni / arawarete / tagawazu to shiru zo / kagiri narinikeru* « To know that everything is revealed in the Law of reality without contradicting it, this is the apex (of knowledge) »²⁷. Almost all the instances of the words *minori* and *makoto* we have in Jien’s Century show that they are used to underline what would have been for him as for most Tendai scholarly monks the fundamental characteristic of the *Lotus Sutra*: a teaching of reality.

We may now understand more fully the compound *minori no hana*. We could see it as a mere poetical or rhetorical paraphrase of the title of the Lotus Sutra: the Flower of the Law, for *hokke*, the Sino-japanese title of the Sutra. In Japanese poetry, as in many other traditions, and as any good dictionary of classical Japanese will show, the flower is a symbol of transientness and impermanence, of the phenomenal dimension (*iro*) devoided of substance. It is indeed an illustration of the buddhist teaching of impermanence. But here, in those poems with a strong flavour of Tendai dogmatics, the compound acquires a particular strength: it means the ‘Flower of Reality’, that is the conditional phenomena in their really existing aspect (*jissô*) as revealed in the *Lotus Sutra*. This paradoxical expression recalls the *coincidentia oppositorum* that is illustrated by mystical literature of different religious traditions. If any doubt subsists as to this double meaning of *minori*, let me quote one more example, poem 141²⁸, the second part of which reads: *karenu minori no / hana wo miruramu* « We will see the flower of the august Law / of Reality that never fades away », where the verb *karenu* (‘does not fade’) strengthens this meaning of *minori*.

This same word occurs regularly from the beginning (poem 9) to the end (poem 141) of Jien’s Lotus collection, thus fulfilling the aim he gives himself in his foreword: « to establish a passage to the understanding²⁹ of the real doctrine of the *Lotus Sutra* » through the help of the Japanese language.

I have already on two different occasions³⁰ tried to demonstrate that this collection of poems is to be viewed as an instance of ‘mystical literature’ in Japanese, that is as a text purporting to relate a personal experience of an ecstatic state. I think that Jien himself gives us enough evidence of that in the postscript of his collection, where he asserts that he « entered the contemplation of the one identity of the two truths and composed hurriedly a few poems »³¹ from the end of autumn to the beginning of winter. I have suggested too that this assertion is to be confronted to the ‘manifesto’ that is to be found in the preface Jien wrote to the *Rônyaku uta-awase*³² in which he defines high standards for the *waka* as well as for the Japanese language: « Indeed the pure Japanese language (*yamato-kotoba*: here obviously meaning *waka*)

has been flourishing as the speech-art (*kotowaza*) of our country. It consists in five verses of 5-7-5-7-7 [syllables] which represent³³ the five [buddhist] elements³⁴ and the five [Chinese] phases³⁵. There is not a thing, be it real or mundane³⁶, separate from them: in the real truth, there is nothing apart from the five elements, starting from the buddha-body to the level of inanimate vegetation; in the mundane truth, there is no separation from the five phases, from heaven and earth to seas and mountains. Hence from the beginning, in the age of gods of Great Japan, when the Plain of Fertile Reeds was created, the words of the gods have been transmitted and there is nothing ahead or apart from them... » The rest of the text goes on comparing the three languages, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese and points to the similarities between Sanskrit and Japanese, thus alluding, without using the expression itself, to the idea of the identity of *waka* and *dhâranî*³⁷. What is relevant to our purpose is that Jien states positively that *waka* are to be read on two levels, corresponding to each of the Two Truths, a statement which makes all the more interesting the assertion quoted above that he « entered the contemplation of the one identity of the two truths. »

Let me add here another brief quotation from the postface in classical Chinese that Jien wrote to a collection of Japanese poems inspired by Bo Juyi, where we find words very similar to those of the foreword quoted above: « Letian³⁸ is the emanation-body³⁹ of Mañjuśrî, and to assuage his Chinese words to Japanese poetry is the custom of the Lands of the Gods »⁴⁰. Here the Chinese language as means of expression of Chinese poetry is seen as cumulating the sacred character of Indian buddhism; *waka* poetry allows it to pass, in an assuaged/japonized form, to the land of the *kami*. We find once more the *wakô-dôjin* principle linked to the *honji-suijaku* view, with the interesting precision that India and China are clearly conceived as one entity, albeit a hierarchized one, apart from Japan.

In the same occasions, I also ventured to suggest that these poems could be understood as instances of ‘mystical exegesis’, that is *kanjin-shaku* or « exegesis based on the contemplation of one’s mind »⁴¹ as the highest level of « exegesis made by entering the text »⁴²: each word of the Sutra becomes an object of meditation gradually raising through the four doctrines as defined by Tendai dogmatics⁴³. Thus Jien, if we may believe his own words, wrote these poems in a state of contemplation induced by the hundred excerpts from the *Lotus Sutra*: they are therefore to be viewed as concrete manifestations of this contemplative exegesis.

Since we have ascertained that *minori no hana* means « the flower of the Law », that is the *Lotus Sutra*, as well as « reality underlying the transient », which is purported to be the teaching of this Sutra, the simple act of looking at the flowers, *hana*

wo miru, such a hackneyed topic of Japanese poetry, acquires a new dimension: it is both the contemplation of the text of the *Lotus Sutra* and the contemplation of the phenomena as real, an illustration of the « exegesis through the contemplation of one's mind ». The verb *miru* 'to see' (with the other nuances of 'to look at', 'to contemplate') is probably the most frequently used in Jien's *Lotus* collection, with 26 occurrences, while the object of the verb may mostly be not only flowers, but the light or radiance as well (a constant reminder of the assuaging of radiance) emanating from the Buddha's forehead in the first chapter of the *Sutra*.

That we are here dealing with a kind of practice based on contemplation is reinforced by the use of another verb for 'to watch, to contemplate', *nagamu* (six occurrences), having four times *hana* as object. There is a double entendre in that expression, since *nagamu* means 'to make a poem' as well as 'to watch'; *hana wo nagamu* is thus « to contemplate the flower of reality or the *Lotus Sutra* » as well as « to celebrate the *Lotus Sutra* in poems ». With this ambivalence in mind, we can read a deeper meaning in poem 58⁴⁴: *haru no yama / aki no nohara wo / nagame-sutete / niwa ni hachisu no / hana wo miru kana* « I can cease singing praises of mountains in spring and fields in autumn; in the garden I contemplate the lotus flower », a rare instance of 'flower' being explicited as 'lotus flower': the true contemplation as well as the only worthwhile object of poetry is the *Lotus*.

Another powerful element that gives Jien's *Lotus* collection a mystical undertone is the very frequent recurrence of the adjective *ureshi* « joyful », or some derivate: 15 in all, that is a little more than once in every ten poems. I mentioned previously the French author Blaise Pascal, who left a very famous fragment (*Mémorial*) in which he summarily relates a deep experience he had of divine grace, for two hours during a November night in 1654. They are very short notes, sometimes single words jotted down: « Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace », and further: « Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy ». Two things are obvious here: that joy is part of religious experience, and that it is very difficult to give an articulate description of this experience while one is still under its spell. « Certitude, feeling, joy, peace »: one could easily find these four notions in Jien's poems, but the most conspicuous one is without doubt 'joy'. Even if we keep in mind that *ureshi* is only the translation of the Chinese expression *kangi*⁴⁵ omnipresent in the *Lotus Sutra*, the fact remains that such a lack-lustre device so many times repeated by somebody we can surely credit with a better poetical expertise is evidence enough for something more than rhetorical concern. Jien seems to be short of words, and can only repeat 'joy', just like Pascal did long after him.

In an article published last year⁴⁶, I tried to show that another fundamental tenet

of Tendai dogmatics has found so to speak a congenial environment in Jien's buddhist poetry on the *Lotus*, that is the idea of the awakening of plants⁴⁷, narrowly linked to the dogma⁴⁸ of the presence of Buddha-nature within the inanimate nature⁴⁹. It goes without saying that these 'dogmata', be they 'original Awakening'⁵⁰, the awakening of plants or buddha-nature within the inanimate, are not to be found explicitly formulated in the *Lotus Sutra*, but Japanese buddhist poetry, as especially exemplified by Jien, through a subtle use of traditional rhetorics and clichés linked to plants and landscapes, succeeded in insufflating these ideas into the general Japanese understanding of the *Sutra*, although we can already find hints of this process in some Chinese poems of the Six Dynasties. A good example of the implantation of these interpretations is to be found in the poems on the Ten Suchnesses⁵¹, and there is no need to demonstrate that the all-important word *hana* often means the mind itself.

Thus Jien is typical of this process of sacralization as regards the Japanese language itself as first an expression of religious experience and secondly an object of religious contemplation through a plurality of meanings which can resonate in depth with the Sacred Scriptures while keeping a literary form of surface and which can be held as a transposition of a foreign scholastic teaching into a native language. This sacralizing process involves the Japanese landscape as well, inasmuch as it is the object of poetical rhetorics operating in the *waka*; all the elements of the poetical landscape become metaphors for the awakening of the mind, for the preaching of the Law and for the universality of buddha-nature.

I would now like to compare Jien's collection with another one which we have every reason to consider as near as can be to its predecessor: the *Hundred Japanese Poems on the Lotus Sutra*⁵² by Son.en.

The imperial prince Son.en⁵³ has a social status and a career almost exactly parallel to Jien. He was too a novice and then a prominent figure of the Shōren-in; he was chosen four times to be head priest of the Tendai school and, besides being a very distinguished calligrapher, he was a poet in his own right, with forty pieces included in the *Shin-kokin waka-shū*; he was also the compiler of his illustrious elder's collected poems, the *Shūgyoku-shū*, which contains Jien's *Hundred Poems on the Lotus Sutra*. We may therefore safely surmise that he was familiar enough with Jien's work to be directly influenced by him. His very practice of composing Japanese poetry as 'Dharma-offering'⁵⁴ must have been influenced by the number of poetical collections made by Jien under this pretext and there surely should be an element of emulation in the later poet. Son.en's own *Hundred Poems on the Lotus Sutra* are not so well known as Jien's, but it is surely worth the while to study both collections together.

The disposition of Son.en's work shows at first glance greater literary concern than Jien's: besides the scriptural captions, the poems are divided according to the traditional headings of poetical collections: four seasons, love, miscellanea, Japanese deities. These headings allow him to inflect the content of his poems according to the general themes and allow very interesting encoding of buddhist matters.

Even a superficial reading reveals the more manifest differences between the two poets: while Jien uses 31 times the words *nori* and *minori*, these words appear only 11 times in Son.en's poems, that is to say around half as less with allowance to the differing number of poems, and the compound (*mi*)*nori no hana*, so emblematic in Jien and used eleven times by him, is seen only twice in Son.en. Once only for the expression *hana wo miru*, and, generally speaking, the verb 'to see' occurs much less frequently, with one occurrence only for *nagamu*. What is more, the word *ureshi* is completely lacking. The conclusion of these simple observations must be obvious: Son.en deliberately avoids, as far as possible, all the conspicuous locutions revealing too manifestly the buddhist nature of his poems.

We will now see that Son.en operates in a much more subtle way: we could say he starts where Jien ends. Let me show by a few examples how he relies more fully on the sheer poetical device of the *waka*, leaving most of the time to the reader the task of understanding the way it is connected to buddhist doctrine.

Thus for poem 8⁵⁵:

Yama-zakura / sakinu to kikaba / oshinabete / izuku mo haru ni / narinikeru kana

As I heard that blossomed
cherry-trees in the mountains,
here and there,
everywhere, the spring
has come as well.

Only the scriptural heading: *If they have heard this Law, all will have realized the awakening of Buddha*⁵⁶ allows us to realize that awakening to buddhahood is equivalenced to the full blossom of nature as a whole.

Deliberate (we can suppose, coming as they do from such a luminary of Tendai teaching) misreadings of characters adapt exotic details of the Sutra to more homely Japanese poetical topics, as in the caption *A breeze fragrant of sandalwood rejoices the heart of the multitude*⁵⁷, where the change from the character 'sandalwood' to 'plum'⁵⁸ gives the pretext for the poem:

(2) *Ume ga ka o / tamoto ni sasou / harukaze no / akanu nagori wa / kokoro ni zo shimu*

The spring wind
to my sleeves invited
the scent of plums:
its steadfast traces
infuse through my heart.

We have other instances of adaptations of more fabulous things to familiar environment:

*He does not realize that in the lining of his clothe is a priceless pearl*⁵⁹

(29) *Tobi-ideyo / sode ni hotaru o / tsutsumite mo / koromo ni kakeshi / tama no hikari o*

Let it fly out!
even hidden in my sleeve
the firefly throws
on my clothe
its pearly light.

A literal translation of a Chinese expression (often itself being a rendering from Sanskrit) yields another meaning that may be used poetically and implicates nature in the preaching of the Law:

*Ānanda always delighted in erudition*⁶⁰

(31) *Ikutabi mo / kikamahoshiki wa / ogiwaraya / tsuyu fuki-musubu / aki no yû-kaze*

Again and again
I wish to hear it
on the field of reeds
blowing and rolling dew drops
the evening wind of autumn.

Here as below, the autumn wind is the source of a sacred erudition to be heard over and over again, all the more so because *aki* means both 'autumn' and 'void': the autumn wind preaches Emptiness.

The message of the Buddha, in its different degrees of complexity, is assimilated to the different perceptions of the natural phenomenon most sung in poetry, the cherry-blossom and the impossibility of describing it adequately:

*In parables and stories, they preach the Law without hindrance*⁶¹

(12) *Sari tote wa / kumo to ya iwamu / yama-zakura / mada tazune-minu / hito ni kataraba*

And then shall we have

to call them clouds
the mountain cherries
if we must describe them to those
who have not yet seen them?

We have here an image of the pervasiveness of Buddha's wisdom, infusing the whole world:

*In the wisdom of the Buddha, it is like a drop in the ocean*⁶²

(18) *Hitoeda o / taoreru fuji ni / Tago no ura no / chisato no nami no / iro o miru kana*

In a single twig
of wisteria plucked off
we can see the colours
of the ten-leagues waves
in the Tago bay.

which is enhanced by a hidden use of numbers: one (*hitoeda*) and thousand (*chi-sato*), the One in the thousand-fold, merged (if that is not too far-fetched) in non-duality (*fuji*)⁶³.

The whole natural environment is conceived as preaching the Dharma:

*He addressed the vast crowd, proclaiming such words*⁶⁴

(21) *Kono sato wa / kyô kiki-somuru / hototogisu / mukashi no shiranu / koto kataru nari*

In this village
the cuckoo we heard
today at last
tells us things
ignored in the past.

We have in the same way more definite allusions to the predication by the inanimate, thunder being heard as Buddha's voice⁶⁵:

*The Buddha will abide permanently in space, preaching the Law to the multitude*⁶⁶

(24) *Hisakata no / sora ni koe shite / narukami no / satsuki no yami o / terasu inazuma*

In the infinity
of the sky voices:
thunder and its lightnings
darkness of the fifth month
illuminate.

Other natural phenomenons are met as well:

*Like the wind in the sky is not obstructed by any hindrance*⁶⁷

(77) *Kumori naku / haretaru sora o / fuku kaze ni / nori toku hito no / kokoro o zo shiru*

In the wind blowing
in the cleared up
and cloudless sky
we recognize the heart
of him who preaches the Law.

Besides an explicit reference to the Buddha, rather uncommon in Son.en's collection, we find that, like in the preceding power, the poetical effect is produced by taking literally a scriptural comparison.

One of the most famous scenes of the Lotus Sutra, the apparition of the jeweled stupa of Prabhutaratna, is assimilated to a familiar autumn scene, deeply enriched yet with a double entendre of the main word:

*They heard too the voice coming from the stûpa*⁶⁸

(39) *Meguri-au / aki o wasurenu / chigiri nite / tokoyo no kari mo / ima ki-naku nari*

Coming round again
they did not forget
their promise of autumn-meeting
the wild geese from Land Eternal
now crying.

Here Prabhutaratna becomes a goose, but *kari* means as well 'provisory, conditional, phenomenal'⁶⁹, its meaning contrasting with the 'Eternal World' that is the mystic land of Tokoyo (which is the realm of the dead as well). This poem reads thus like the apparition of the eternal in a provisional form. 'Now' is the decisive present time of the preaching of the *Lotus Sutra*, a common expression in Tendai dogmatics.

Son.en seems to love this metaphor of the goose for Prabhutaratna, the long-extinct Buddha coming in its mummified body to support the *Lotus Sutra*; here we have an emblematic use of this multi-levelled metaphor.

*Even if some of them could be able to grasp empty space*⁷⁰

(41) *Ama tsu sora / te ni torazu to mo / kumoji yuku / kari dani nori no / moji o tsuraneyo*

Even if we can't grasp
with our hand the vast sky,
let the geese flying through the clouds

even transiently line up
the letters of the Law.

Kari no moji means both « signs traced in the sky by the geese » and « provisional letters », that is, a complete Japanese rendering of the characters meaning *kana*, the Japanese syllabing writing⁷¹; the teaching of the *Lotus* given in Chinese hieroglyphics is displayed in the phenomenal dimension, i.e. Japanese language and landscape.

This leads me to introduce here an explicit reminder of the idea of “ assuaging radiance to mingle with the wordly dust” that can be found in the part devoted to ‘deities’:

*Such is the imposing majesty of the divine powers*⁷²

(91) *Tsuki mo hi mo / hakarazu kage o / yawarageku / chiri ni majiwaru / michi zo kashikoki*

The moon and the sun
have assuaged their light
unexpectedly
excellent is their way
of mingling with the dust.

The luminaries are buddhas and bodhisattvas, here mainly Śâkyamuni and Maitreya; we have here with the words *kage wo yawarageku chiri ni majiwaru* a complete rendering in Japanese of the Chinese compound *wakô-dôjin*.

A more radical interpretation of this idea through a poetical image is the bold assimilation of the bodhisattvas emerging from the ground to witness and preserve the Lotus teaching, in a famous scene of the Sutra, to the fowls of the natural world. The whole cosmic scene becomes a homely landscape, albeit a poetical one, which in turn acquires religious meaning. The innumerable bodhisattvas are but a flock of ducks taking to fly, but now ducks are reversedly the bodhisattvas witnesses of the *Lotus*.

*The earth trembled and split up; from its midst sprung innumerable millions of bodhisattvas*⁷³

(54) *Asahi sasu / migiwa no kôri / uchitokete / muretsutsu asaru / ike no ashi-gamo*

Under the rising sun
the ice on the bank
begins to melt
they are gathering to fish
the reed-ducks of the pond.

The whole nature as well makes offerings to the Buddha, just like the other attendants of the *Lotus* preaching: in a splendid image, the red glowth of evening twilight becomes a portent of religious celebration:

*Silken canopies, banners, clothes, music*⁷⁴

(35) *Nagamureba / sora sae nori no / tamuke shite / kumo no hatate no / aki no yû-gure*

As I am watching
even the sky to the Law
makes offerings
with its banners of clouds
in the autumn dusk.

The hermit's life is assimilated to the solitary life of the poet in the Chinese tradition.

*Should he recite this scripture in a desert place*⁷⁵

(38) *Fukuru yo no / sora ni minori no / koe sumite / hito naki mado o / terasu tsuki kage*

In the deep of night
pure is the voice
of the real Law in the sky
moon light is shining
on the deserted window.

Let us notice here the association of *sora* with *minori*, 'sky > emptiness' vs. 'sublime Law > reality > plenitude'⁷⁶, responding to and contrasting with the *minori no hana* typical of Jien: in the emptiness of the world resounds the voice of the reality of the *Lotus*.

It even seems that Son.en is so engrossed in the contemplation of the *Lotus Sutra* that he forgets it came from China. If only the Chinese could have heard it! A clear, and rare, allusion to the taoist practices, deemed to be typical of Chinese lore.

*His disease will vanish, he will not grow old, he will not die*⁷⁷

(86) *Karabito mo / minori ni awaba / itazura ni / yomogi no shima no / kusaba tazuneji*

Had the Chinese too
encountered the real fruit
they would not vainly
seek the herbs
of the Magic Islands.

Here again, *minori* as 'fruit>kernel' is contrasted with *kusaba* 'leaves of grass',

in a clear allusion to the scriptural passage seen before: « My assembly has no more branches and leaves, it has only firm fruit ».

We have yet another bold assimilation of the Japanese landscape in the following poem, where Mount Fuji⁷⁸ is likened to the Buddha in nirvana but eternally present in the middle of this world.

*I manifest myself as being in Nirvana or not*⁷⁹

(59) *Kiyuru ya to / yoso ni wa hito no / shirayuki no / kumo ni kakururu / Fuji no shiba-yama*

Has it disappeared
may people from afar ask
when the wood-covered Fuji
is hidden in clouds
as white as snow.

Clouds on the Fuji-san covered by snow: white on white; is it there, is it not there? 'Non-dual': this question has no answer, as the mountain is neither there nor not there.

The imagery of love is very commonly found in mystical poetry, and I tried to show in a previous lecture at the International Center for Japanese Studies how Jien made use of it. Son.en uses it much more lavishly for describing, indirectly, the joy of meeting the Buddha or his Law.

*Those who gain profit from his preaching of the Law have their whole body filled with joy*⁸⁰

(63) *Au yonaka no / hito no nasake mo / mi ni amaru / namida o sode ni / itsu tsutsumiken*

Midnight meeting
all too human feelings
overflow my body
when could I in my sleeve
hide away my tears?

Yo is 'night' as well as 'the world': 'midnight' and 'in this world'. It is to be noticed how careful is Son.en to avoid the *ureshi* ('joyful') so frequent in Jien's collection. He even goes so far as to evoke tears under the scriptural heading of 'joy', reminding us of Pascal's 'tears of joy'.

More precise is the following poem, inspired by a frequent cliché of amorous poetry.

*Where constantly he may have dwelt, or walked or lain*⁸¹

(64) *Wasururu / toki shi nakereba / yomosugara / nete mo samete mo / hito zo koishiki*

There is no time indeed
for oblivion
all night through
be I asleep or awake
I yearn after that person.

Even the message of the Buddha is interpreted according to the rhetoric of love:

*They rejoice appropriately and spread the teaching*⁸²

(65) *Omoi-wabinu / semete yukari o / tazuneba ya / hito-zute ni dani / kikamahoshiki ni*

In my sorrow
if only from her near ones
I could enquire
How I would like even by hearsay
to hear from her!

Other amorous undertones can include the landscape.

*With the eyes received at birth from his parents, he will see all the three thousand worlds*⁸³

(69) *Miru tabi ni / hedatezariseba / Ikoma-yama / kimi ga atari no / kumo mo itowaji*

Every time I look at you
since you don't turn them down
o Mount Ikoma
neither will I loathe
the clouds around you.

We have even a rather more risqué elocution:

*They will all have their reflection as they are appearing on his body*⁸⁴

(71) *Omokage ni / tsuretsutsu hito no / mi ni sowaba / tsurenashi tote mo / nani ka uramin*

If like an image
on that person's body reflected
I'd accompany her
how could I resent
her indifference?

There are too lively vignettes harmonizing the letter of the Sutra with lyric feelings:

*In order to rejoice living beings, they manifest innumerable divine powers*⁸⁵

(76) *Kazu naranu / waga namida o mo / itowade ya / sebakki tamoto ni / yadoru tsuki-kage*

Of my tears shed
inexhaustible
will it not be disgusted
the moonlight lingering
on my narrow sleeve?

The last poem is a nice reminder of the nature of this small collection : a dharma-offering, *hōraku*, done to the gods, that will melt in the landscape.

*In this present existence he will earn retribution for his merits*⁸⁶

(100) *Obie-yama / fumoto no kumo to / nari ya sen / hosoki keburi o / kami ni makasete*

Majestuous mountains
will it become
a cloud on its slope
the thin smoke
that I entrust to the gods?

This rapid survey of some features of Son'en explicitly buddhist poetry compared to Jien's *Lotus* collection cannot allow us to draw definitive conclusions, but it was enough, I think, to discern a clear evolution between the two monk-poets.

There can be no doubt on the buddhist character of Son'en's collection: it is evident from the textual disposition, similar to Jien's, i.e. a series of Chinese quotations from every chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* followed by Japanese poems inspired by those quotations. It is evident too from the overtly buddhist vocabulary, either in Japanese guise⁸⁷, or even in Sanskrit⁸⁸, cleverly but not obtrusively interspersed through the hundred poems as a periodic reminder of their religious nature.

But, as the same time, the latter poet makes conscious steps toward the occultation of too prominent buddhist traits, first by arranging his collection according to the poetic canon traditional since at least the *Kokinshū*, then by deleting or diminishing words and expressions too characteristic of religious tenets. The surface level of this collection thus makes more 'purely' poetic reading than Jien's. The buddhist tonality is effected through the 'hieroglossic' link between the Chinese scriptural captions and the Japanese poems underneath, inducing readers to understand these poems as an unfolding of the kernel (*minori*) enclosed in the Chinese hieroglyphics.

A deeper reading reveals a complex handling of words based on double entendre

(commonly found in classical poetry), like ‘goose’ and ‘conditional’, or contrasting encounters of words, like ‘sky/void’ and ‘real/Law’. This use of words leads the reader to appreciate, or even contemplate, the superposition of meanings, building up to a contemplative exegesis.

The many-layered meanings extend to the landscape imagery; in the same way that words and expressions belong to at least two dimensions, the landscape and its elements are both the phenomenal ones and metaphors of the religious dimension: wild ducks are bodhisattvas, Mount Fuji is the Buddha in nirvana, the thunder is the voice of dharma-preaching, and so on. The same is true of human sentiments, like love.

By virtue of the *wakô-dôjin*, the phenomenal world described in provisional language becomes a self-sufficient sign of identity between the sacred and the profane.

References (a fuller bibliography is provided in *La Centurie du Lotus de Jien*, to be published hopefully in a not too far future):

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Notes

1 In *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*, p.95-96.

2 Delmer Brown and Ishida Ichiro, *The Future and the Past: a Translation and Study of the Gukansho, an interpretative history of Japan written in 1219*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979.

3 Zazu 座頭.

4 Daisôjô 大僧正.

5 Manaka, p. 214-215 and 222-223.

6 本地垂跡

7 Taga, *Jien zenshû* p. 257.

8 Ichinyo 一如.

9 Hongen 本源.

10 Dôtai 同體.

11 雖似狂言又通食道.

- 12 法
- 13 妙法
- 14 Taga, p. 259; the numbers given here are those I gave in my forthcoming translation.
- 15 Hurvitz, *Lotus Blossom*, p. 29.
- 16 今此眾無復枝葉點純有貞實; Hurvitz, *ibid.* p. 29. Watson, *Lotus Sutra*, p. 30: “Made up solely of the steadfast and fruitful.”
- 17 唯有一乘法
- 18 Taga, p. 260.
- 19 *Jikkyō* 實教.
- 20 *Gonkyō* 權教.
- 21 唯此一事實餘二則非真; Hurvitz, p. 34 (my modifications).
- 22 Taga, p. 274.
- 23 Poem 11; Taga p. 259; also quoted by Professor Yamada in his article mentioned above.
- 24 *Hōben-bon* 方便品.
- 25 *Shōhō-jissō* 諸法實相.
- 26 Taga, p. 271.
- 27 This poem comes under the caption « They do not contradict the reality of dharmas » 皆與實相不相違背, from Chapter 19 ‘The Merits of the Dharma-Preacher’.
- 28 Taga, p. 277, does not give the variant reading chosen here; see Manaka, p. 240.
- 29 The character *tsū* 通 means both ‘to pass through, communicate’ and ‘to understand’.
- 30 At the IVth International Conference on the Lotus Sutra at Leiden University (May 1998) and at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Kyoto, February 2000).
- 31 *Nitai-ichinyo no kan ni irite tachimati ni shi-go no sekka wo yomu* 入二諦一如之觀忽然詠四五之拙歌 (the term ‘one identity’ is found in his foreword as well); Taga p. 277; Manaka p. 241.
- 32 *Ronyaku gojishshu uta-awase-jo* 老若五十歌合序; text in Manaka, p. 434-438.
- 33 *Hyō-su* 表.
- 34 *Godai* 五大, i.e. earth, water, fire, air (wind), void (emptiness) 地水火風空.
- 35 *Gogyō* 五行, here probably metal, wood, water, fire, earth, as in the *Mohezhiguan*, viii b, p. 108b.
- 36 *Shinzoku* 真俗.
- 37 *Waka soku darani* 和歌即陀羅尼, which is to be sure an important element for a proper understanding of those poems as well as for the self-representation of Japanese as a ‘mystical language’, but to discuss it here would lead us too far astray.
- 38 That is, Bo Letian 白樂天 = Bo Juyi 白居易.
- 39 *Keshin* 化身, or ‘transformation body’, the lowest of the three bodies of a buddha.
- 40 Text in Manaka, p.431.
- 41 觀心釋
- 42 *Nyūmon-geshaku* 入文解釋.
- 43 According to the definition in the new edition of the *Bukkyō-gaku jiten*, p. 102 a.
- 44 Taga, p. 266.
- 45 歡喜
- 46 J.-N. Robert, « *Nihon bukkō no naka no sei-rō-shi* ».
- 47 *Sōmoku jōbutsu* 草木成佛
- 48 I use this word in its original meaning of ‘tenet’ as a translation of the buddhist term *gi* 義.
- 49 *Mujō-ushō* 無情有性.
- 50 *Hongaku* 本覺.
- 51 *Jūnyoze* 十如是.
- 52 *Ei-Hokekyō hyakushu waka* 永法華經百首和歌, as edited by Yanase Kazuo 築瀬一雄 in 1961.
- 53 Son.en (shinno) 尊圓[親王], son of emperor Fushimi; 1298-1356.
- 54 *Hōraku* 法樂.

- 55 This, too, is my own numeration, following Yanase Kazuo's order. Now, the page number of the *Lotus Sutra* refers to my French translation (*Le Sûtra du Lotus*), though I give here an English rendering of the *Lotus* captions according to Hurvitz and Watson's translations with my own modifications. The captions are given henceforth in italics without quotation marks.
- 56 'Skillful Means', p. 85.
- 57 'Preface', p.51.
- 58 *Sen* 梅 in the Sutra, *bai* 梅 in the quotation.
- 59 'Five hundred disciples', p. 202.
- 60 'Bestowal of prophecy to the learners', p. 207. Here 'erudition' is in Chinese tamon 多聞, a calque of Sanskrit *bahusruta* 'having much listened'.
- 61 'The Parable', p. 126.
- 62 'Medicinal Herbs', p. 152.
- 63 See note 78.
- 64 'Bestowal of Prophecy', p. 155.
- 65 This is but the common scriptural metaphor of Buddha's thunder-voice (*raishô* 雷聲) taken au pied de la lettre, but with a powerful poetical impact.
- 66 'Bestowal', p. 159.
- 67 'Miraculous Powers of the Thus Come One', p. 339.
- 68 'Jeweled Stupa', p. 222.
- 69 As the japanese reading of the character *ke* 假.
- 70 'Jeweled Stupa', p. 230.
- 71 When read *kemyô* 假名, the same characters mean 'provisional denomination', the second of the three truths in Tendai dogmatics (*Mohezhi guan*, p. 1c; quotation from Nāgārjuna).
- 72 'Wonderful Sound', p. 364-365.
- 73 'Springing from the earth', p. 267-268.
- 74 'Masters of the law', p. 212.
- 75 'Masters of the Law', p. 220.
- 76 The character 實 is the antonym of 虛.
- 77 'Former Acts of Bodhisattva Medicine King', p. 352.
- 78 Often written as 不二 and meaning 'Non-such', but the same characters read *funi* mean the buddhist notion of 'non-duality'.
- 79 'Life-span of the Buddha', p. 287.
- 80 'Detail of merits', p. 293.
- 81 'Detail of merits', p. 303.
- 82 'The Merits of Appropriate Joy', p. 306.
- 83 'Merits of the Master of the Law', p. 310.
- 84 'Merits of the Master of the Law', p. 323.
- 85 'Miraculous Powers of the Thus Come One', p. 338.
- 86 'Exhortations to Samantabhadra', p. 391-392.
- 87 *Nori, hotoke*.
- 88 We have one terrible *tantagetta* for Tathagata in poem 90.

【要旨】

慈円から尊円へ
風景と言語の和歌における秘儀化

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法華經にもとづいた日本語で表現された和歌の研究の一環として、この論文では、13世紀の天台僧 慈円の『詠法華經百首』から、14世紀の尊円の『法華經百首』に至るこのジャンルの展開を考えてみたい。

私は以前に、慈円の和歌集が日本の文学史の上で、仏教の教えを密かに詠み込んだ、いわゆる「道歌」(釈教歌)であることを論証したことがある。

すなわち、慈円はその自序において、彼の歌は、観想によって生み出された特殊な意識の状態を表現することを意図した神秘的な道歌、別名 釈教歌であることを明確に説いているからである。この道歌という概念は、完全に文学的であって、慈円の深遠な瞑想体験そのものを強調するものではないことを、私は強調しておきたい。こうした考えによって、我々の周りの自然の描写の中に、仏教の教義的な教えが、慈円によっていかにうまく表現されたかという日本の和歌の伝統的修辞学(レトリック)の展開の一面を、私は積極的に考察してきた。文学的な伝統に、このような宗教の教えを組み込んだ結果、法華經によって影響を受けた明確な仏教和歌集でなくても、いかなる歌も、仏教の教えを暗号的に読み込んだものであるという、いわば記号の「反転」が生じることになったのである。

ところで、慈円から100年以上時代が下がる尊円は、その宗教的経歴は慈円とよく似ていたが、法華經にもとづいた百歌の和歌集を著した。しかし、それらの歌が、彼の瞑想の体験の中で詠まれたという点は明確にしていない。

彼の歌を慈円のそれと比較すると、その歌が明らかに宗教的な要素がなくなったことが分かる。また内省化、自己集中が進み、仏教の教義的言及は見られなくなっていく。このように尊円は、伝統的な和歌の風景の中により深い秘儀を詠み込んだ。そして、このような秘儀は、慎重に詠み込まれた言葉によって生み出されたものである。このような変化の中に、日本の法華經文学の展開を見ることができるであろうか。